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ABSTRACT

Information about the needs, interests, and use of recreational facilities was obtained from 407 undergraduate students from the University of Maryland. Responses to a 15-item telephone survey were received from 90 percent of a stratified, random sample of 450 students. There were 154 residents, 160 dependent commuters, and 93 independent commuters. Residents included those living in residence halls and fraternities and sororities, dependent commuters living with relatives, and independent commuters living alone, with a spouse, or friend. Eleven of the 15 items significantly discriminated among at least two of the three groups. Eight of the 11 significant differences were between the commuters generally and the residents. One interesting difference between types of commuters was that resident and independent commuters were more likely to spend their leisure time at their place of residence than were dependent commuters, but residents and dependent commuters were more likely to be satisfied with campus recreational facilities than independent commuters. Residents, as compared to commuters, engaged in nearly twice as many recreational activities during the school year, preferred participant to spectator sports, and were more informed about campus recreational opportunities when they first enrolled. Information is presented on types of recreation engaged in and proposed for the campus. (SW)

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STUDENT RECREATION: A COMPARISON OF COMMUTER AND RESIDENT STUDENTS

Margaret E. Foster, William E. Sedlacek and
Mark W. Hardwick

Research Report # 4-77

Sponsored by the Office of Commuter Affairs

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Summary

407 undergraduates (90% response) were surveyed on their needs, interests and use of recreational facilities. Responses of independent commuters (living alone, with spouse or friend), dependent commuters (living with relatives), and resident students were compared, using analysis of variance, Newman Keuls post hoc tests, and Chi square at the .05 level. Results indicated that 11 of the 15 items showed differences between at least two of the groups. and that 8 of the 11 differences were between commuters generally and residents. For example, resident students, as compared to commuters: engaged in nearly twice as many recreational activities during the school year, preferred participant to spectator sports, were more informed about campus recreational opportunities when they first enrolled, were more likely to feel that campus facilities meet their recreation needs, and were less likely to use recreational facilities off-campus.

Residents and independent commuters were more likely to indicate their place of residence as where they spend their leisure time; however, residents and dependent commuters were more likely to be satisfied with campus recreational facilities than independent commuters. Information on types of recreation engaged in and proposed for the campus is also presented.

The controversy over whether commuting students are getting a fair share of campus resources remains an issue at many schools. The University of Maryland, College Park which enrolls about 27,000 undergraduates, 75% of which are commuters, was faced with the task of allocating $1.1 million for campus recreation. A survey of student attitudes, needs, interests, and use of recreational facilities was conducted[1] and this report focuses on the comparison of resident and commuting student responses to that survey.

Research on the differences between commuter and resident students has shown that commuters tend to be older, achieve lower grades, participate in fewer campus activities,[2, 3] are more concerned with their mental health, and have more financial and employment problems[5]. However, recent evidence indicates that there are important differences among subgroups of commuters. For instance it has been found that compared to the white commuter, the black commuter tended to be an older, married, female, traveling farther, spending more time and money to get to campus and receiving lower grades.[6]

Other research has shown important differences between commuters who live with parents or relatives (dependent commuters) and those who live alone, or with a spouse or friend (independent commuters). Independent commuters are likely to have a job, are more likely to participate in campus activities and intramural athletics, and feel a greater sense of identity with their school than dependent commuters. In fact it has been concluded in several studies that independent commuters appear more similar to

resident students than to dependent commuters.[7, 8] However, independent commuters have been found in one study to have higher grades than residents.[9]

Method

A 15 item telephone survey of a random sample of 450 University of Maryland, College Park undergraduates, stratified by sex, class and full or part time status in proposition to their representation in the campus population, was conducted by trained student researchers. Responses were received from 407 (90%) of those in the sample (154 residents, 160 dependent commuters and 93 independent commuters). Residents included those in residence halls, and fraternities and sororities. Responses were compared using analysis of variance, Newman-Keuls post hoc tests and Chi square, all at the .05 level.

Results

Eleven of the 15 items significantly discriminated among at least two of the three groups. Since we would expect about 3 tests out of 15 to be significant due to chance[10], we can conclude that differences do exist on interests, needs, attitudes, and use of recreation facilities based on student residence.

Eight of the 11 significant differences found were between the commuters generally and residents. For example, resident students, as compared to commuters, engaged in nearly twice as many recreational activities during the school year (resident 15.9, independent 7.8, dependent 7.8); preferred the role of

participant to spectator (resident 42%, independent 27%, dependent 29%); were more informed about campus recreation opportunities when they first enrolled (resident 55%, independent 43%, dependent 46%); were more likely to feel that campus facilities meet their recreation needs (resident 82%, independent 71%, dependent 51%); and were less likely to use recreational facilities off campus (resident 50%, independent 75%, dependent 75%).

Additionally, residents preferred to fund recreation with a general fee assessed to all faculty, staff and students (44%), while commuters favored funding based on individual usage (independent 51%, dependent 53%). Both groups of commuters more often cited jobs or distance from campus as reasons for curtailing their recreational activities.

Residents (68%) and independent commuters (71%) were more likely to indicate place of residence as to where they spend their leisure time; however, residents (87%) and dependent commuters (86%) were more likely to be satisfied with campus recreation facilities than independent commuters (75%).

Table 1 shows that independent and dependent commuters engaged in similar types of recreation activities as compared with residents. For instance, commuters are more likely to read and less likely to watch television than residents. Table 2 indicates that all three groups tend to prefer the addition of similiar new campus activities. Ice skating and social events were most frequently indicated by all. However, dependent commuters more frequently requested music lounges, independent commuters

ranked canoeing higher, and residents preferred more co-ed intramurals than the other groups.

Discussion

The findings suggest that there are important differences between commuters and residents which should be considered in planning for student recreation and allocating funds for that purpose. Generally independent and dependent commuters were similar to one another and different from resident students. One interesting difference between types of commuters was that residents and independent commuters were more likely to spend their leisure time at their place of residence than dependent commuters. Thus dependent commuters may be a likely potential audience for campus recreational facilities if they are provided.

One reaction to the data might be that the special needs of commuters are obvious and would be considered by any committee or administrator making decisions about recreation facilities. However, it has been demonstrated that the attitudes of student personnel workers tend to be more negative toward commuters than resident students,[11] and it would be fairly easy to have these attitudes translated into policies and funding decisions that favor resident students. While it could be assumed that providing some recreational facilities comes with providing on campus housing, allocating some resources directly aimed at commuter recreational needs seems appropriate. In fact, funding some facilities on an as-used basis, as is preferred by commuters, would seem to be worth serious consideration.

Table 1.

Rank Order of Activities Engaged In During School Year By Students' Place of Residence

Rank	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter	Resident
1	socializing	socializing	listening to music and socializing
2	listening to music	movies	
3	movies	listening to music and reading	movies
4	reading		basketball
5	basketball	concerts	football
6	game room activities	tennis	reading
7	concerts	football	concert and tennis
8	football	game room activities	
9	television	television	
10	tennis		game room activities

Table 2.

Rank Order of Activities Students Wish to be Added to the Campus Recreation Program

Priority	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter	Resident
1.	ice skating	ice skating	campus social events
2.	campus social events	horseback riding	ice skating
3.	music lounges	campus social events	co-ed intramurals
4.	horseback riding	bike paths	bike paths and horseback riding
5.	bike paths	canoeing	
6.	special interest workshops	special interest workshops	special interest workshops
7.	co-ed intramurals	music lounges	chartered excursions and music lounges
8.	canoeing	campus picnics and chartered excursions	
9.	chartered excursions		canoeing
10.	campus picnics	co-ed intramurals	campus picnics

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